

V. I. PUDOVKIN

FILM
TECHNIQUE
AND
FILM ACTING

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY IVOR MONTAGU

MEMORIAL EDITION
with Portrait, Memoir and a revised and completed
record of the author's film work

VISION

VISION PRESS LIMITED

157 KNIGHTSBRIDGE

LONDON SW1X 7PA

Pudovkin on Film Technique first published in English by

Victor Gollancz Ltd., October 1923

2nd Impression, January 1930

Reprinted 1954

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY PHOTOLITHOGRAPHY
CLARKE, DOBLE & BRENDON LTD.,
PLYMOUTH,**

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PREFACE TO THE MEMORIAL EDITION

THIS reprinting, by Vision Press, is now the only form in which are available to the public the two major written works of V. I. Pudovkin, *Film Technique* and *Film Acting* in any language.

The selected edition of the author's writings* published three years ago in his home country contain only extracts, drastically abbreviated in the case of the former.

During the later years of his life, Pudovkin hesitated to authorize republication of his earlier works, modestly believing that, as his ideas had become modified and broadened in the light of experience, his mature views might be misunderstood should these first writings reappear without qualification. He need not have worried. Everybody can understand that these books, written thirty and twenty years ago, do not and could not say the last word about film creation. They do spell out its A.B.C. As Lewis Jacobs wrote, in an introduction to the last American edition: "So sound are their points of view, so valid their tenets, so revelatory their analyses, that they remain to day, twenty years after their initial appearance, the foremost books of their kind." The ideas set out in *Film Technique* remain basic to any philosophy of the film, to appreciation of the relation of real material to film appearance, to any understanding of

* Izbrannyye Statyi, see p. 388.

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exactly what we are doing when we create an effect upon the screen, and they will so remain as long as cinema continues.

It is hard to overestimate the influence that *Pudovkin on Film Technique* has had on the development, not just of film theorizing, but of practical film-making. This influence has no doubt been greater abroad than in the author's own country where, in the 'twenties, argument and speculation about film was a commonplace and Pudovkin, acclaimed as a director of genius, was as writer seen only as a popularizer of ideas already current. But in England and Hollywood above all, where so many splendid films had been made for years without their authors having leisure to think in face of the time-pressure of chasing the weekly pay-cheque, these ideas arrived with the thunder-clap simplicity of Columbus' egg. Makers of film were inarticulate in those days, theorizing the domain of high-brow, long-hair, egg-head. In a moment these books became, and for a generation they have remained, film "bibles". The established dipped surreptitiously. The young—our present established—absorbed them with their milk. The amateur found sudden illumination. Today's critics were bred on them. Their contents are the grammar and the syntax upon which all present-day film thinking and film working are indirectly founded. It is time that they be removed from the hazards of the second-hand barrow and re-presented with the dignity they deserve.

In now making them available, therefore, the publishers have merited well not only of the film world and its outskirts, but of all who are interested in aesthetics and

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the science of analysis of the creative process in any art form. The texts are published as those of classics deserve, exactly in their original form, and to bring their author nearer to the reader we have added a portrait and a personal memoir, as well as brought up-to-date and made complete the "Iconography" that lists his film career.

I.M.

PREFACE TO SECOND PRINTING OF THE MEMORIAL EDITION

TEN years ago, when the Memorial Edition first appeared, the present writer commented that the works included here retained an evergreen freshness and applicability. The proof of this is shown by the concomitance that now, ten years later, almost forty years since the first of them was written, a new printing has been called for.

This is an extraordinary thing when you come to think of it. Film-making itself is hardly 75 years old. And for more than half of this time Pudovkin's classic has held the field, teaching generations of beginners the elementary bases on which rest all the ramifications of the film-making craft or art.

In most branches of art it is the custom from time to time to speak of the latest fashions current as having superseded everything that has gone before. There is little harm in this, and much good, for it is healthy that each generation should feel a glow of discovery and not

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be constricted unduly by the frameworks of the past. Nevertheless, it is of course only modes of presentation and styles that change, to fit the novel interests corresponding to the changing life that surrounds each fresh artistic wave. The basic laws of method deriving from the technical nature of each art do not change but remain as consistently applicable in practice as do simple mathematics to any novel calculation.

Pudovkin, though a great creative artist, was not a profoundly original theoretician. The principles he sets out in his writings were less his own discoveries than generalisations he learned from his own teachers and verified in practice. But such was his enthusiastic and straightforward nature that, as he grasped them, he set them out with an energy that still carries everyone forward and a simplicity that enables everyone to understand.

When I used the word "beginners" in this context, be it understood that I meant not only the youth on whom continuity and perpetual renewal of cinema depends, but the hardened professional veteran of a hundred battles with front-office, the greybeard versed in other disciplines of culture—just anybody to whom it has not hitherto occurred to *think* about the cinema. Begin with Pudovkin, you start on the right tack. Everything that follows, the boundless possibilities of sound-film, the technical refinements made feasible by delicate modern instrumentation, falls into place because you came with the right approach.

I.M.

PERSONAL MEMOIR BY IVOR MONTAGU

VSEVOLOD ILLARIONOVICH PUDOVKIN was one of the three top great men in the Soviet cinema: Eisenstein, the self-conscious genius and intellectual, satirist, creator of unforgettable patterns and researches; Pudovkin, naïve and rugged countryman from Penza, whose simple dramatic sincerity aroused shattering emotion; and Dovzhenko, poet and artist from the Ukraine, touching the timeless, digging deep beneath the skin.

Now that Pudovkin has died suddenly at the age of 60, the last is the only one left.* Certainly, there are other wonderful national screen personalities in the USSR, but for the most part the height of their medium is character, rendered in dialogue and other touches of characterization which need a share of native culture for full perception, and cannot wholly cross language and social barriers. These three alone were so essentially graphic in their spheres that anyone, of any land, could sense all their power.

Pudovkin achieved at least four films that will for ever remain classics of the cinema: *Mother*, *The End of St. Petersburg*, *Storm Over Asia*, and *Suvorov*. The first three of these were made while he and others were still treating actors as "types". In none of these could one really say that he created character, or in the first, for example, that the mother or son had the roundness and depth of

* Dovzhenko died in November, 1956.

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the persons created by Gorky. Yet such was the power of his own feeling that, through these films, he depicted social injustice, and the revolt against it, the injustice of imperialist war, and the revolt against it, the injustice of colonialism, and the revolt against it, with a force and emotional impact that have never been excelled. In the fourth, when talk was beginning to preoccupy the Soviet cinema with problems of character, he created the historical figure of the name part so vividly that it is impossible for anyone who has not seen the film to read of that general and not see him always in every line, action and gesture exactly as he was portrayed.

Pudovkin made plenty of other pictures, stamped with his personality and of the highest class. It was entirely characteristic of him, his simplicity, directness and lack of introspection, that he also threw himself readily and enthusiastically into yet a number of other subjects that were not really suited to him, and proved failures, being outside his special qualities.

Comparatively speaking, he was not a great theorist, not a great innovator. Yet precisely because of this, because he was not an intellectual, the theory he set out—inferences from Griffith, digested through Kuleshov; undigested scraps of Eisenstein; scraps of Stanislavsky; all harmonized and rearranged into a coherent framework pattern by his own simple, direct enthusiasm—has had a far greater influence than the often subtler, profounder analyses of his mentors.

His first two little books—two tiny paper pamphlets in Russian, long read and read to bits and fallen apart and entirely lost in their country of origin, then put into

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German, and finally translated by me as *Pudovkin on Film Technique*—have educated a whole generation of film makers. They are part of general film grammar, and even today convey truths that still remain basic—whatever qualifications they now need—despite all technical improvements. Amateurs read them. The greatest in contemporary British cinema brought them selves up on them. And the other day a perfect stranger on an aeroplane, catching sight of my passport, introduced himself to me as the Hollywood producer of a current festival prizewinner and avowed his own entry-ticket and bible in the industry to have been that all-arousing book. The secret, the author's heartfelt absorption and transmission of essentials, plus the infection of his own keenness.

Himself he remained always unstudied. I remember discussing with him once his then latest and far from successful picture *Deserter*. He was describing with excitement his making of the early ship-welding scenes—in themselves, certainly, exceeding well done. My interjections were reserved, and presently I criticized his treatment of the scenes, quoting as authority his own remarks—set out in his book and taken to heart by all of us—about the necessity of visualizing each film as a whole and not allowing hypertrophy of a section to disturb the general balance. He looked at me with the utmost astonishment. "Did I write that?" he said.

It was the same with his relationship to acting. What he wrote about acting was simple and true, and written with such conviction, as a reflection of his own effort at the time to grasp the truth, that it stimulated hundreds

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of good minds all over the world. Yet, loving acting himself, on the screen he was an impossible ham. This was equally true whether he was directed by another (the principal in Otsep's *The Living Corpse*) or self-directed (the Nazi general in *The Russians*); whether in a leading part as in these two films, or in a tiny cameo, such as the fop with the sunshade in Kozintsev and Trauberg's *New Babylon* or the mad preacher in Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (this last, I fear, was a not very obscure joke played by Eisenstein on his friend). He was eager to try anything, and not at all a self-judge. If it was wrong, he neither noticed nor grieved over it. If it happened to be right, it came off, and became immortal.

There was never a more loyal and enthusiastic son of the Soviet Union. He was proud of his decorations. Neither my wife nor I will ever forget his shining eyes as he retailed to her stories illustrating Lenin's coolness and wisdom in revolutionary crises, simple legends that had fired him so that he could convey their fire, exactly the quality of dramatic transmission that made his films so tremendous when they hit their target. Pudovkin also liked the English. He learned the language from fellow prisoners of war in a p.o.w. camp in Germany during 1914-18. When he first came to London his smattering enabled him to read a speech to the Film Society of which we had carefully marked the accentuation. Later, Marie Seton helped to polish him, and in the end he spoke extremely well, though with rather a plum in his mouth, and held his own splendidly among the great concourse that came to honour him and Picasso in Felix